The Miracle

George Fullen

Ed Wilson was a nice guy. He was my roommate during my brief stay at State University. We were both ex-servicemen, but Ed was much younger than I, or so it seemed to me even though he was my junior by only two years.

I had never seen a more confused young man than Ed. He had every neurosis and psychosis that we were studying in psychology classes, and he was very interesting to the small group which met in our room as a walking case history of a schizoprenic, manic depressive, paranoiac and a good many other things I have since forgotten. As closely as we could diagnose the case, he had everything but delusions of grandeur. And we felt that his case, as well as an other we might have been considering at the time, was rooted in Freudian psychology. We were all much impressed with the complexity of simple urges.

I was very concerned about Ed because I knew, better than any of the bull session gang who did not have to live with him, how real and important his problem was. None of us was finding it particularly easy to fit ourselves back into civilian life, and Ed was completely unsettled because his civilian life was one of bickering parents and too many brothers and sisters, none of whom seemed to have been wanted, Ed, who was the youngest, least of all.

One Monday morning, after both of us had been home for the week-end, Ed announced: "I'll never go back home again. My old man raised hell all week-end."

"What about?" I asked.

"Everything," Ed replied, "especially my mother. He raises hell with her all the time. He raises hell just for the pleasure of it. He expects her to know what he wants before he knows himself, and jump when he yells."

Ed was always worried about his mother. She was the only member of the family for whom he felt any real affection. The rest he characterized as high class bums—high class because they would work, but bums nevertheless because they respected nothing and no one.

"And my sister," Ed continued, spent her whole week-end telling me what a simpleton I am and wondering how I had been able to stay in school this long."

I knew how much that remark must have hurt, for Ed was not finding it easy to maintain his grades in school. I wondered why people who had no ambitions themselves considered it so necessary to work against those who did have.

"And she cussed my mother because she hadn't ironed a blouse she wanted to wear."

"Can't your sister iron her own clothes?" I asked.

"She won't," Ed answered. "They all think mother is a slave. I wish I could get her away from there."

"She probably wouldn't leave," I said, not sure of why I thought so, but I did.

Ed said no more, but that night he had a bad dream again. He had not had one since I had thought it best to say something to him about his talk of the war. All of us talked of the war, but none of us desired to bring back the bad days. We preferred to recount the funny incidents, the crazy characters we had known, the binges we had been on, and the girls we had met briefly. Ed had been at the front for three months, during the crucial Battle of the Bulge, and that was what he could not shake from his mind, what he always wanted to talk about.

I had told him, as kindly as I could, for I felt guilty about saying anything at all, that we had all been in the war, that we had all done what we were told to do, that some of us had done more than he, that some had done less, that I had known several Englishmen who had been in every big battle from Dunkirk through the invasion of Germany, but that we all wanted to forget the unpleasantness, and that he should do the same for his own peace of mind. His attitude, since that talk, had been much healthier, and his dreams about the war, always so violent that they awakened me, had become much less frequent.

Ed wanted to have dates with the girls on the campus, but his self-consciousness and lack of confidence were nowhere more obvious than when one of them cornered him.

I asked him one day: "Didn't you meet any women overseas?"

"Sure!" he replied, and recounted his escapades, in great detail, with the women of France.

"Well," I said, "what makes you feel so funny about American girls? They're all pretty much alike."

"But American girls speak English," he replied and looked surprised when I collapsed from helpless laughter.

It was too good to keep. I confided it to the gang at the next bull session while Ed was out of the room.

"What he needs is a girl to inflate his ego," one of the psychologists said.

"Certainly!" said Bob Elliot who came from the same town I did. "That's what I've been saying for a long time."

"But who?" I asked. I was willing to try anything that would give him the self-esteem which he needed so badly.

Everyone was silent for a minute. Then Elliot said, "I know! My girl has a friend she wants me to fix up with a blind date for the Prom."

"What does she look like?" someone asked.

"Just a girl," Elliot replied. "No raving beauty. No zombie either."

"Fix it up," I said.

Several days later, Ed informed me that he had a blind date for the Prom. I feigned surprise. He had just met the girl that afternoon for a coke with Bob and Bob's girl, Marcia. He was flushed and paced nervously around our small room.

"I'll bet she thinks I'm a big fool," he said, finally.

"Why?" I asked. "Did you pour a coke on her?"

"No. Oh, no!" he said. "Nothing like that."

"Very sensible," I remarked. "Nothing would be the least foolish thing you could do."

"Do you think she'll like me?" he asked.

"Sure! We like you; don't we?"

"But you're men."

"But we're also people," I replied, groping for some straw to use against such literal-mindedness, "and she's people. She'll like you."

I said it emphatically, but I was amazed when he looked so relieved. I wondered why he should take my word for it.

"I'll have to buy a suit," he said.

"Don't you have one?" I asked.

"No," he replied. "I've never had a suit."

"Never had a suit?" I said, incredulously.

"Never," he repeated.

Every new bit of information concerning his past showed more clearly why he was as he was. It had been so many years since I had had my first suit that I had no idea how old I was at the time it was purchased for me by my not overly indulgent parents.

A few days later, he returned from town with a new suit. It was a beautiful suit, and he had paid much too much for it. But, I thought, it would take a very fine suit to make up for those which I had dis-

covered that he had wanted and had not had. He had not had one when he wanted to go to a high school dance; he had not had one when his grandmother died; he had been the only person graduated from his high school wearing a sweater. His father thought suits for a child a lot of damned foolishness.

On the evening of the Prom, a crisis occurred. Ed caught up with me in the shower to tell me about it.

"I don't have a tie to wear," he announced, breathlessly and tragically.

I was shocked again, and I thought back over the times I had seen Ed dressed to go out to a show or to go home and realized, then, that I had never seen him wearing a tie. The situation was so odd that, for a moment, I could not bring my mind to bear on it. When, finally, my wits did return, I said: "Well, you can wear one of mine."

"Gosh! Thanks!" he said and rushed away.

"But don't get the blue one with yellow dots," I called after him.

When I had finished my bath and returned to our room, Ed was gone and so was the blue tie with yellow dots. I had to wear a wine one with red peacocks. At the dance that evening, I didn't get to speak to Ed or meet the girl he was with, but I smiled encouragingly once, as we sailed past him, and missed a step in the hot rumba we were doing. Ed was laboriously performing the box step. I drove home, after the dance, and did not hear the news until the following Monday.

Marcia and the girl Ed had gone with were temporarily in disgrace because they had been several minutes late in getting back to their dormitory and had had to arouse the house mother who had probably been waiting up to deal with the inevitable laggards. Of course, such tardiness was always made the butt of many jokes. Ed was enjoying it immensely. There had, he told me, also been a date Saturday night and a picnic all day Sunday.

When I saw Elliot later, he confided: "Ed has made a killing."

"Good" was the only classic remark I could think of at the moment.

After that, I saw very little of Ed. He was in and out of the room, but more out than in. And I was trying to get myself organized for a change of schools when the term ended two weeks later. The day I left, Ed said his farewells in the morning because he had to go and help his girl get on the train to go home. He was, sensibly, staying at school during the week between terms.

Two weeks after I had left State, I had already discarded the people I had known there and was thinking in terms of my new

locale. And soon, new names and faces took up the empty places. I was, therefore, very much surprised when I happened to meet Elliot two months later. He was home on the week-end and we chanced to meet on the street.

After we had talked for a time about what we were doing in school and I had listed the differences I had found between State and my new alma mater, I asked: "How is Ed—, Ed—; you know, my roommate."

"Ed Wilson?" Elliot asked. "You wouldn't know him. He's a 'Big Man On the Campus,' now. I've run into him several times this semester and he has very condescendingly spoken to me."

"Well, well," I said. "We have performed a miracle. We have changed a shrinking violet into climbing ivy."

We stood and laughed about it for a minute; then we parted. As I walked down the street, I chuckled to myself and tried to visualize the new Ed. I might have felt guilty if I had not been so certain that he was happier, now. We had, truly, performed a miracle, and we had performed our miracle by giving him the only psychosis which would over-power the others and the only one which he did not already possess, delusions of grandeur.

THE BALL

Roger Chittick

B. was very tired, alone and bewildered in the great city. How he had come to be in the center of the city he did not know, and his futile searching to find a way out had worn him into a state of total exhaustion. He was too tired to go further, so he sat down on the sidewalk and went to sleep. He thought it rather strange, in the short interval between the time he sat down and the time he went to sleep, that nobody seemed to pay any attention to the fact that he was there; in fact, the populace seemed to be entirely unconcerned over the fact that a man should be sleeping on the busy sidewalk at mid-day. The great masses of people surged past and seemed never to notice the sleeping figure. It was as though such an occurrence was so commonplace as to deserve no notice.